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A New Kind of Force: Examining charisma in the light of Gandhi's moral authority

Our first duty is to preserve the noble presence of moral responsibility in nature: of a being who is able to recognise the good-in-itself as such.¹

The Dilemma of Detachment

Max Weber is renowned for advocating the idea of a value-free science of culture. It was Nietzsche for whom an irrational ‘will to truth’ became aware of itself as a problem, and who characterised modern culture as one in which the ‘highest’ values had withdrawn from the public sphere. The phenomenon of the autonomous individual developed within this culture. For Weber, the world is objectively meaningless and visible only through the perspectives of ideal-types. Value-perspectives are created by the dynamic of charisma and routinisation, which confronts and displaces prevalent forms of culture.² Charismatic individuals are those whose devotion to a calling gives them a capacity to create a *community of judgement*.³ Charisma is thus a grievous matter for Weber, it is the source of norms, standards and meaning bestowed upon society by dominant personalities. Hence, ‘charisma, in its most potent forms, disrupts rational rule as well as tradition altogether and overturns all notions of sanctity. Instead of reverence for customs that are ancient and hence sacred, it enforces the inner subjection

¹ from Lawrence Vogel’s introduction to Hans Jonas [1996. Mortality and Morality: A Search for the Good After Auschwitz](#). Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 17.

² D. Owen. 1994. *Maturity and Modernity: Nietzsche, Weber, Foucault and the Ambivalence of Reason*, London & New York: Routledge, 91-93, 101, 96.

³ Owen. *Maturity and Modernity*, 130-131.

to the *unprecedented and absolutely unique and therefore Divine*. In this purely empirical and value-free sense charisma is indeed the specifically creative revolutionary force of history.⁴

Years before his embarkation on a scholarly quest for value-free truths about society, Weber had stated his motivational force in the form of a pedagogical ideal: ‘We do not want to train up feelings of well-being in people, but those characteristics we think constitute the greatness and nobility of our human nature.’⁵ The work of the cultural scientist expresses the immanent political goal of evoking the noble side of human character. Political morality remained an abiding concern for him, as reflected in his comments on the dialectic of the ethics of conviction and responsibility. Weber seems stranded between scientific detachment and political commitment. There is a further problem. To the extent that the personality of the law-giver (and one who creates a community of judgement is a law-giver) appeals to an ideal of nobility, the charismatic person must appear intuitively, to be a bearer of noble qualities. But perceptions of nobility change over time. Charisma is unstable. The greater the degree of stability, the closer the charismatic figure is to being noble; that is, representing the Absolute in popular consciousness - hence the attempt to harness charisma to the functions of state.⁶ Stability in charisma signifies that the perception is acknowledged over time, unlike Hitler’s for example, which dissipated rapidly during the Second World War. But placed as we are in history, how do we theorise a historically fluctuating perception?

This could be an intractable problem, but we must think about it. A political system that relies increasingly upon tyranny to preserve itself, whose functionaries seek to secure its civilisation via increasing doses of intimidation, is a system on the edge of disintegration. In its last phase the British colony in India was reverting to its

⁴ M. Weber. 1978. *Economy and Society*; vol 2, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press: 1117. Emphasis added.

⁵ From The Nation State and Economic Policy (Freiburg Address); cited in Owen, *Maturity and Modernity*, 98.

⁶ I refer to the Absolute not as an eternally valid and unquestionable Order, but as a manifestation of law and social stability.

foundational violence, a fact that both reflected and accelerated the erosion of its hegemonic legitimacy. In the face of rising nationalist sentiment during and after the Great War, the British elite became radicalised: the 1919 Amritsar massacre was a deployment of state-terror designed to educate a rebellious populace.⁷ The colonial animus towards Gandhi and the Congress was deeply felt at the highest levels of government. During the Second World War, Winston Churchill was reportedly in favour of letting Gandhi die in case he went on a hunger-strike. This was also the view held by Lord Linlithgow, Viceroy from 1936 to 1943, who took India to war without consulting the Indian political leadership.⁸ This radical imperialism could be countered by radical nationalism, as indeed it was, but the consequences were likely to be destructive. Gandhi invented a form of resistance that was radical precisely on account of its moderation - this despite the official depiction of him as an anarchist and Bolshevik. It was his firm rejection of imperial arrogance combined with moderation in conduct that gave rise to Gandhi's political authority. And this authority was based on an alternative perception of public virtue.⁹

Actions, Outcomes, and Justifications

Gandhi's politics and his moral philosophy were inseparable, so it bears comparison with the pessimism and ethical nihilism rampant in his time. Nihilism and annihilationism are closely related. Gandhi's rejection of militarism and the terrorists' martyr cult had a great deal to do with his charisma, especially in light of the fact that the nationalist-minded public were fascinated with patriotic terrorists. Let us see where such an inquiry can lead us.

⁷ D. Rothermund. 1991. *Mahatma Gandhi: An Essay in Political Biography*, Delhi: Manohar Publications, 34.

⁸ On Jan 1, 2006 the BBC cited newly published Cabinet papers showing that Winston Churchill favoured letting Gandhi die if he went on hunger strike. The prime minister thought India's leader should be treated like anyone else if he stopped eating while in custody. His ministers persuaded him against the tactic, fearing Gandhi would become a martyr if he died in British hands.
http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/4573152.stm (Accessed April 9, 2009)

⁹ 'Nobility is a perception, not a concept. Or - what comes to the same thing - our concept of nobility is rooted in a perception, not in another concept... nobility is a value, an estimation, a ranking, and therefore it is an ambiguous mixture of aesthetic and moral qualities that may be named and understood but that must in any given case be recognized directly.' S. Rosen. 1989. *The Ancients and the Moderns - Rethinking Modernity*, New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 12.

If nihilism be defined with Nietzsche as the belief in the world's valuelessness; and hence in an extraneous source of value or justification; then all religious-minded persons are nihilists; along with those who sought meaning but did not find it, or who believed in traditional values but discovered that value had evaporated. Nietzsche believes we are all bound to be conscious or unconscious nihilists, and that humans will remain in this condition for the immediate future, measured in centuries.¹⁰ However, historicists also derive purpose, if not from an afterlife, from a future whose contours are known to them via their fore-knowledge of history.¹¹ This imaginary state of affairs is distinguished from the ordinary optimism of lesser beings by virtue of an anticipatory self-exoneration from moral standards. Historicism as a source of value encompasses the perspectives of imperialists, nationalists, communists and fascists, and places them (whether they be religious-minded or not), beyond ordinary norms.

Thus it is not merely the religious-minded who derive their purposes from an extraneous or transcendental source. Self-styled atheists are capable of doing the same. We are obliged to ask therefore, whether it is really a belief in Heaven or History that defines the nihilist, or something more fundamental. Gandhi was a religious person and believed in a higher purpose. Was he therefore a nihilist? Or was his philosophy the very antithesis of nihilism? In my view, the central issue with nihilism does not arise from the purported source of justification, but from the nature of the answers derived from metaphysical thought. There are three aspects to our current nihilist predicament:

1./ Anomie, the liberation from justifications; or the easy flitting from one justification to another by those who place themselves beyond good and evil. The question is *what activities* appear as justified to the doer, rather than the *fact* of their needing a

¹⁰ See A. White. 1990. *Within Nietzsche's Labyrinth*, New York: Routledge, 15-25; and K. Carr. 1992. *The Banalization of Nihilism: Twentieth century Responses to Meaninglessness*, Albany: SUNY Press, 13-22.

¹¹ I use the term *historicism* to refer to the belief in a teleologically determined end of history; or that history possesses an immanent purpose. An interesting account of this concept may be read in S. Rosen. 1969. *Nihilism: A Philosophical Essay*; New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 56-93. See also Vogel's introduction to Jonas, *Mortality and Morality*, 1- 40.

justification.

2./ The decline of dialogue and the divorce between reason and goodness. Absolute truths, whether secular or theological, lead to the conceit that all truths are interpretations. In this sense, totalitarianism and relativism mirror each other. If 'real' truth can only be produced by mathematical sciences, ethics must retire to the realm of speculation. One ethical standard is as good as another. This is a nihilist condition.

3./. Nihilism's annihilationist character is manifest in the metaphysic of glory, which is inextricably linked to violently virile pursuits.

Gandhi's language was straightforward, and he could admit to being perplexed. He was not a relativist, and whilst criticising modernity, did not believe that modernity had resulted in a trans-valuation of all values. To the contrary, he held that certain truths transcended history and a democratic political edifice could be built upon them.

Ahimsa, or non-violence, was such a transcendent truth. He delivered radical demands in conventional language, all the while telling Indians and anyone who would listen, about the reasonable-ness of non-violence. He refused to accept the normless pretensions of science and I doubt he would have understood Weber's value-free social science. Gandhi's wisdom retained the connection between truth and virtue. Thus in 1947 he said, 'I regard the employment of the atom bomb for the wholesale destruction of men, women and children as the most diabolical use of science.'¹²

In contrast to the Semitic theodicy of misfortune which imbues a metaphysically defined vocation with the promise of future redemption, Gandhi's non-violent *satyagraha* was a confrontation with, rather than an appeal to the theodicean reconciliation of good and evil.¹³ Whatever his theological beliefs (his interpretation of the Bihar earthquake of

¹² See Rothermund, *Mahatma Gandhi*, 114.

¹³ 'In this theodicy of the disprivileged, the moralistic quest serves as a device for compensating a conscious or unconscious desire for vengeance..once a religious conception of compensation has arisen, suffering may take on the quality of the religiously meritorious..' M. Weber, in *The Sociology of Religion*, cited in Owen, *Maturity and Modernity*, 104. Owen observes that 'indeed, the emergence of the theodicy of misfortune is tied by Weber to the movement from a militarised peasantry to a de-militarised plebeian

1934 as chastisement for untouchability was an invocation of the divine origins of a natural disaster)¹⁴, Gandhi was convinced that violence was evil, even when committed for the sake of a good cause. No good could come of evil wrought by human agency. As he said, 'What difference does it make to the dead, the orphans and the homeless, whether the mad destruction is wrought under the name of totalitarianism or the holy name of liberty or democracy?' ¹⁵

Gandhi's politics confronted semantic anomie as well as militarist exterminism. His engagement with alterity was couched in terms of acceptance rather than annihilation. Totalitarian ideologies and democratic dialogue mutually exclude one another. Totalitarianism can oscillate between dogma and relativism - when affinity is enforced and world-views are upheld at the point of a knife, one truth is as good as another. Or as good as the amount of force it brings to the field. Democracy can only be built upon truths that are discursively arrived at, and non-violence is a pre-requisite of discourse. Intimidation contaminates conversation and leads to the political abolition of truth. Gandhi had a dialogic approach to truth, and hence his epistemological stance was open-ended rather than absolutist or teleological. This enabled him to communicate meaningfully with people and intellectuals of vastly differing traditions; a discursive skill essential for a democratic movement in a society as complex as India.

Gandhi's Impact

A central issue in the debate about Gandhi's charisma has to do with courage and manliness, and their redefinition. These ideals were the small change of colonial discourse that defined certain communities as unmanly and others as martial. Such

strata: "Here and only here plebeian strata become exponents of a rational religious ethic" ..' (104). The strongly devotional elements in nationalist mobilisations plus the presence in Punjab of demobilised soldiers from the British Indian Army gives Weber's depictions a strong correspondence with Indian political reality in 1918-21.

¹⁴ For the correspondence between Gandhi and Tagore on the Bihar earthquake, see S. Bhattacharya, (ed). 2008. *The Mahatma and the Poet: Letters and Debates between Gandhi and Tagore 1915-1941*, New Delhi: National Book Trust India, 158-161.

¹⁵ *Harijan*, 29-9-1940. *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*; vol 79, 257. Henceforth, CWMG. See bibliography for the weblink.

characterisations were used in colonial ethnography in the nineteenth century and became more central to it after the rebellion of 1857, after which the upper-castes of north India were excluded from military service. The extremist wing of nationalism from late nineteenth century onwards was obsessed with manliness and relied upon texts such as the Bhagwad Gita to incorporate a sense of military mission among upper-caste patriotic youth. Symbolic issues of masculinity and strength were even more marked among communities such as the Sikhs and Pathans. Gandhi played upon the popular significance of these themes by giving them a fresh meaning all his own. We can understand the resonance that his message carried within popular consciousness. Yet the new direction and meaning that he gave to the ideals of strength and courage was remarkable. The same can be said of Abdul Ghaffar Khan, also known as the Frontier Gandhi, a follower of the Mahatma till his last days. What took place was a transmutation of masculine consciousness on a nation-wide scale, inviting those who prided themselves on their bravery to face the violence of the colonial state without flinching. It was a form of self-assertion that appealed to large numbers of helpless people, empowered them with the capacity to resist, gave them a chance to participate in a great cause, and drew humble persons into mainstream politics. In this sense Gandhi's charisma was profoundly democratic and ethically novel, even revolutionary. And it stands in complete accord with Weber's understanding of it as 'the specifically creative revolutionary force of history.'

Given the difficulty of defining charisma, I shall attempt to evoke it via descriptions of certain crucial episodes in India's national movement. These descriptions are culled from secondary sources and eye-witness accounts, and in one case from a fictional representation. But all of them show a populace deeply affected by a new kind of moral force, to the point where they became bearers of Gandhi's truth.

The Akali Movement and the Guru Ka Bagh Agitation of 1922.

The period following the first non-co-operation movement (1918-22) was marked by violence in Punjab. Much bitterness was generated by the massacre at Jallianwala Bagh in Amritsar in 1919. What caused particular outrage was the pro-British attitude of the head priests of the gurudwaras, and thereafter an agitation was launched to reclaim the

Sikh holy places from these men. The government upheld their control over the lands surrounding the shrines. On February 20, 1921 about 150 Sikh volunteers, or Akalis, were killed at the holy shrine of Nankana Sahib, 50 miles from Lahore, when they attempted to take possession of one of its five gurudwaras from the Mahant Narandas. Writing about this incident, Gandhi drew attention to the fact that although the volunteers were carrying ceremonial arms, they upheld their pledge to refrain from violence, and allowed themselves to be brutally cut down by the mahant's armed guards.¹⁶ Another site, known as Guru Ka Bagh lies a few miles from Amritsar, and contains gurudwaras linked to Tegh Bahadur (the ninth Guru) and Arjun Dev (the fifth Guru). Since August 1921 the site fell formally under the control of the Shiromani Gurudwara Parbandhak Committee or SGPC, constituted in 1920. On August 8, 1922, five Akalis were arrested for theft of firewood, long considered a conventional right for the communal kitchen. From August 25 till September 13, 1922, the local government stopped the volunteers, many of whom were demobilised soldiers of the British Indian Army, and assaulted them for unlawful assembly. On duty were English police and military officers and their Indian subordinates. The Congress Party's inquiry into these events recorded statements by eyewitnesses, including journalists, lawyers, retired teachers and ex-policemen.¹⁷ Testimonies spoke of assaults with brass-tipped *lathis* (wooden staves) on volunteers who calmly took their punishment without flinching or retaliating. The brutality of these beatings indicates a level of animus that does not emerge from official reports. The Akalis were often beaten on their private parts, dragged by their hair, stomped upon by horses, and even thrashed after they had collapsed. They were reported to be praying as all this went on, and several Sikh women and onlookers were moved to tears at the scene. The Reverend C.F. Andrews, a Cambridge missionary and Gandhi's confidante, wrote an eye-witness account dated September 12, 1922.¹⁸

¹⁶Gandhi, *Sikh Awakening*, March 13, 1921. O.P. Ralhan and S.K. Sharma. 1994. *Documents on Punjab, vol 6 Part 1, Sikh Politics (1919-1926)*, New Delhi: Anmol Publications, 42-48.

¹⁷ See Report of the Congress Guru-ka-Bagh Inquiry Committee, in Ralhan and Sharma. *Documents on Punjab, vol 7, Sikh Politics (Guru-ka-Bagh Morcha)*, New Delhi: Anmol Publications, 13-25.

¹⁸ From Andrew's press communique, in Ralhan and Sharma; *Documents on Punjab, vol 7*, 1-8.

When I ... stood face to face with the ultimate moral contest I could understand the strained look and the lips which silently prayed. It was a sight I never wish to see again, a sight incredible to an Englishman. There were four Akali Sikhs with their black turbans facing a band of about a dozen police, including two English officers. They had walked slowly up to the line of the Police.. And were standing silently in front of them.. Their hands were placed together in prayer. Then without the slightest provocation on their part, an Englishman lunged forward the head of his lathi which was bound with brass.. The blow which I saw was sufficient to fell the Akali Sikh and send him to the ground. He rolled over, and slowly got up once more and faced the same punishment over again. Time after time one of the four..was laid prostrate by repeated blows, now from the English officer and now from the police... the police committed certain acts which were brutal in the extreme - I saw with my own eyes one of these police kick in the stomach a Sikh who stood helplessly before him... when one of the Sikhs..was lying prostrate, a police sepoy stamped with his foot upon him, using his full weight.. The brutality and inhumanity of the whole scene was indescribably increased by the fact that the men who were hit were praying to God and had already taken a vow that they would remain silent and peaceful in word and deed. The Akali Sikhs who had taken this vow, both at the Golden Temple and also at the shrine of Guru Ka Bagh, were...largely from the Army. They had served in many campaigns in Flanders, in France, in Mesopotamia and in East Africa... Now they were felled to the ground at the hands of English officials serving in the same government which they themselves had served... But each blow was turned into a triumph by the spirit with which it was endured... The vow they had made to God was kept to the letter. The onlookers too..were praying with them...and for them.. It was very rarely that I witnessed any Akali Sikh who went forward to suffer, flinch from a blow when it was struck. The blows were received one by one without resistance and without a sign of fear..

There has been something far greater in this event than a mere dispute about

land and property. It has gone far beyond the technical questions of legal possession or restraint. A new heroism, learnt through suffering, has arisen in the land. A new lesson in moral warfare has been taught to the world..

Spearheaded by the SGPC, the Gurudwara Reform Movement carried on for three years. Agitations were attended by Sikh *jathas* arriving from as far afield as Canada and China. Each foray towards a major gurudwara (such as Gangsar at Jaito, in the princely state of Nabha in 1924) was marked by an oath of non-violence administered publicly by religious superiors.¹⁹ Gandhi remained in close communication with the leadership of the movement, which explicitly named itself a religious *satyagraha*.²⁰ In June 1925, the government relented and handed over control of Sikh shrines to elected managing committees under a revised Sikh Gurudwara and Shrines Bill.²¹

The Red Shirts of the North West Frontier

The Pathan leader Abdul Ghaffar Khan, also known as Badshah Khan and the Frontier Gandhi, was born into a small khan family in 1890, and educated in a Christian missionary school in Peshawar. Education as the instrument of social upliftment and political transformation remained the obsession of his life. His earliest efforts were to set up village schools on charitable contributions. Their syllabi included studies of the Koran, designed to liberate villagers from the hide-bound interpretations of their mullahs. The Anjuma-i-Islahul-Afaghina (Society for the Reform of Afghans) was founded in 1921, during the first non-cooperation movement. It encouraged social reform, the learning of skills and sanitation - statements of self-assertion against a background of acute colonial neglect of education and social infrastructure. Among its achievements was an impetus to modern Pashto literature and political journalism. For his participation in the nationalist upsurge of 1919-21, Badshah Khan spent three years in rigorous imprisonment (1921-24) partly in proximity with Akali activist Baba Kharak Singh, imprisoned during the Guru-ka-Bagh agitation, from whom he gained inspiration

¹⁹ Ralhan and Sharma. *Documents on Punjab, vol 6 Part 1*, 233, 101.

²⁰ See correspondence between Mahatma Gandhi and the SGPC, *ibid*, 126-151.

²¹ *ibid*, 243.

about non-violence. He met Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru in 1929, the year he founded the Khudai Khidmatgars or Servants of God, a political organisation that also worked for social and educational uplift.²² The movement was quintessentially Gandhian, being deeply imbued with the motive of social transformation.

It is noteworthy that Ghaffar Khan's belief in non-violence derived from his own experience, which taught him that "it was useless to start digging a well after the house was on fire". Combining the status of a tribal chief with that of saint, he was perhaps even closer to his people than Gandhi, and achieved the 'miracle' of transforming his fractious and violence-prone Pathan volunteers into a non-violent mass movement. In his own words, 'My non-violence has become almost a matter of faith with me. I believed in Mahatma Gandhi's *ahimsa* before. But the unparalleled success of the experiment in my province has made me a confirmed champion of non-violence.'²³ Convinced that peace was the coping stone of Islam, and that the greatest figures in Islam's history were known for their forbearance and restraint, he remains an enigmatic figure in the history of the Pathans. The enigma lay in the fact that a community known for its ferocity could produce and hoist such a man as their standard-bearer in battle with its most powerful adversary; and that he appeared to them as a revolutionary whilst remaining rooted in traditional culture. He appealed to religious sanction on the ground that Islam meant tranquility and striving after righteousness, and convinced his people that it was more courageous to die than to kill. The Turkish scholar Halide Edib, who visited the Frontier in the 1930's wrote of his achievements:

'Although he based his simple ideology on religion, his interpretation of it was so universal, that instead of separating the Muslims from the rest of the world, he tried to make them so that they could co-operate with their fellow-men for the good of all...his supreme importance lies in his having brought the simplest and

²² R. Gandhi. 2004. *Ghaffar Khan: Nonviolent Badshah of the Pakhtuns*; New Delhi: Penguin-Viking. 83.

²³ J. BonDurant. 1958, 1965. *Conquest of Violence: the Gandhian Philosophy of Conflict*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 139.

truest conception of Islam into the lives of a most elemental people.'²⁴

Gandhi's description of his own exhortations to the Pathans bears out my point about the resonance between traditions of courage and the novel direction that this strange new agitator gave them:

'At every meeting I repeated the warning that unless they felt that in non-violence they had come into possession of a force infinitely superior to the one they had and in the use of which they were adept, they should have nothing to do with non-violence and resume the arms they possessed before. It must never be said of the Khudai Khidmatgars that once so brave, they have become or been made cowards under Badshah Khan's influence. Their bravery consisted not in being good marksmen but in defying death and being ever ready to bare their chests to the bullets.'²⁵

The commitment of the Khudai Khidmatgars to non-violence was based on the culture of *Pukhtunwali* and Islam. The Congress leadership, susceptible to stereotypes about Pathan ferocity, remained anxious about the Red Shirts' commitment to *ahimsa*. Yet in 1942 the movement obliged the government to station 30,000 troops in NWFP (a three-fold increase over 1941) and this served to lessen the burden of repression upon the rest of India. When it came to the Pathans, the British excelled themselves in cruel punishment and psychologically designed torture including forcing activists to make counter-oaths upon the Koran, violating the sanctity of the womens' quarter in Pathan homes; public exposures of private parts, insertions of tent pegs into anuses and even sexual mutilation. The Peshawar massacre in April 1930 (over 200 killed) and the Bannu shooting in August (70 dead) shocked the country, whilst arousing admiration for the Pathans' patriotism and non-violent spirit. After touring the Frontier, British journalist Robert Bernays wrote that 'some of the stories of the wholesale shootings and

²⁴ Bondurant, *Conquest of Violence*, 143.

²⁵ D.G. Tendulkar. 1961. Mahatma: *Life of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi*. New Delhi: Government of India, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Publications Division, v. 4, 303-4.

hangings made me hang my head in shame.’²⁶ All the while Badshah Khan insisted on patience and restraint as the greatest Koranic and patriotic virtue, ‘abstain from violence and do not defame your nation, because the world will say how could such a barbarous nation observe patience.’²⁷ The Khidmatgar movement grew from a thousand members in 1930 to 25,000 in 1931, with numbers of women entering public life for the first time. It was not lost on the nationalist public that the Englishmen on a civilising mission were behaving like mad dogs, and the volatile Pathans were teaching their rulers a lesson in restraint.

The Khudai Khidmatgar’s openness to non-Pathans and non-Muslims alarmed the British. Government reports noted that ‘probably at no time since British influence was first extended to the Frontier have conditions given rise to such acute anxiety... acts of lawlessness and defiance of authority increased with extraordinary speed, and organisations affiliated to the Congress gained greatly in prestige and popularity.’²⁸ The authorities were especially concerned to prevent nationalist agitation in the NWFP. Khidmatgar prisoners were often made to wear saffron clothes to ridicule their association with the ‘Hindu’ Congress. Officials encouraged the Khan landlords to support the Muslim League and spread rumours about tribal raids on the small Hindu minority. They consistently excluded Badshah Khan from the tribal areas, although Jinnah was allowed a visit in 1936. And they subsidised the clergy to support the League and denounce the Red Shirts as Bolsheviks and enemies of Islam. Today, the dominant stereotype of the Pathan frontier is dictated by the activities of the Taliban. We would do well to remember that the people whom colonial ethnography depicted as being addicted to violence, produced one of the stanchest Gandhian movements in Indian nationalism. The Khidmatgars’ dominated the Frontier from 1930 till 1947. Badshah Khan instilled among his followers a practice of restraint based upon Pakhtun culture and Islam. Halide Edib felt that the ‘psychological aspect of the movement was more

²⁶ Bondurant, *Conquest of Violence*, 138.

²⁷ See M. Banerjee. 2000. *The Pathan Unarmed: Opposition and Memory in the North West Frontier*, Karachi, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 145-166.

²⁸ Bondurant, *Conquest of Violence*, 136.

interesting than its political significance.' She suggested that the Pathans had developed 'a new interpretation of force, which is very unexpected'. In her words, 'non-violence is the only form of force which can have a lasting effect on the life of society..and this, coming from strong and fearless men, is worthy of study.'²⁹

A bitter opponent of the Partition of India, Badshah Khan was the last of those Gandhian stalwarts who could walk across three international boundaries in post-1947 South Asia and be treated by the citizens of four countries as one of their own. He died in 1988 at the age of 98 in Jalalabad, and the antagonists in the Soviet-Afghan war ceased fire for a day to allow his funeral to take place. The Peshawar-Jalalabad border was opened and thousands joined the procession. 'In his death Badshah Khan bore witness to the possibility of a closed border becoming an open frontier, restoring to the North West Frontier its open character of past centuries.'³⁰ Badshah Khan's life exemplified the spirit of satyagraha that stayed alive in India during the darkest years of the twentieth century, proof that the dignified self-assertion of oppressed peoples not only creates a new community of judgement, but can carry a charisma all its own.

Chander Singh Garhwali, the hero of Peshawar

That a Hindu soldier in the colonial British Army should have become part of nationalist folklore in the heart of Pathan territory sounds unlikely today, but testifies to the mood of the times. In 1930, at the height of the civil disobedience movement, large gatherings of Pathan satyagrahis took place in Peshawar, and for a while succeeded in setting up a parallel administration. On April 23, 1930, not just the police but the Army was on duty to quell the disturbances. At one demonstration, it deployed a battalion of the Garhwal Rifles, Platoon 4 of which was under the command of Havildar Chander Singh Garhwali. The streets of Kissa Khani Bazaar were full of nationalist flags, and a Sikh agitator was rendering a patriotic speech in Pashto and Urdu. Slogans such as *Allah-ho-Akbar*, and *Mahatma Gandhi ki jai* resounded in the air. The English officer present, Captain Rickett, decided to disperse the crowd. Upon hearing his order to fire, the havildar pronounced a countermanding order to cease fire. He was reported to have turned to the

²⁹ Bondurant, *Conquest of Violence*, 140.

³⁰ Banerjee, *The Pathan Unarmed*, 2.

Englishman and said, 'Sir, these are all unarmed people. How can we shoot them?' Soldiers of two other platoons followed suit, and one soldier reportedly offered his rifle to the demonstrators.³¹ Officials were shaken by this 'betrayal'. As a civil servant later described it, 'Hardly any regiment of the Indian Army won greater glory in the Great War than the Garhwal Rifles, and the defection of part of the regiment sent a shock through India, of apprehension to some, of exultation to others.' ³² Chander Singh was cashiered, and along with his fellow-mutineers, sentenced to several years rigorous imprisonment.

Some years later, interviewed in prison by the famous left-wing writer, Rahul Sankrityayan, Chander Singh recounted his first-ever meeting with Mahatma Gandhi, in the temple town of Bageshwar, in Uttaranchal in June, 1929. Gandhi was staying at a Dak Bungalow, reportedly performing penances. Chander Singh attended his public discourse wearing his Army hat. The hat caught Gandhi's attention, and he made a light-hearted comment about not being intimidated by Army uniform. The havildar responded that he was ready to cast the hat aside if someone gave him some other headgear. A member of the audience pulled out what was then known as a Gandhi cap, popular with nationalist volunteers, and gave it to Chander Singh. He in turn threw it in the direction of the platform, saying, '*Main boodhe ke haath se topi loonga*' ('I'll take it from the hands of the old man'). Gandhi then flung the cap back at Chander Singh, who took it respectfully, stood up, and with tears in his eyes, saluted the Mahatma with the promise that he would bring honour to the cap one day.³³

The Brahmin Convert

One of the most moving evocations of Gandhi's charisma is contained in a work of fiction, the 1938 novel, *Kanthapura*, by Raja Rao. Narrated as a stream-of-consciousness of an old village woman, the novel has been hailed by some critics as the first major English novel written by an Indian. It deals with the impact of the national

³¹ R. Sankrityayan. 1957. *Veer Chandra Singh Garhwali*, Allahabad: Kitab Mahal, 129-31.

³² Bondurant, *Conquest of Violence*, 138.

³³ Sankrityayan, *Veer Chandra Singh Garhwali*, 113.

movement on the humble inhabitants of a small village in Karnataka province. Issues such as Gandhi's appeal for social reform as part of the freedom movement, the brutality of colonialism's lesser functionaries such as revenue collectors and the police, and the inter-twining of religious feeling and symbols with popular mobilisation are made visible almost effortlessly. The experiences of lower-caste migrant workers on fields and plantations are brought to life, as is the crisis of conscience of the young Moorthi, only surviving son of the Brahmin widow Narsamma, who dreamt of his becoming 'a Sub-Collector at least'.

But Moorthi would have none of this. For, as everyone knew, one day he had seen a vision, a vision of the Mahatma, mighty and God-beaming, and stealing between the Volunteers, Moorthy had got on to the platform, and he stood by the Mahatma, and the very skin of the Mahatma seemed to send out a mellowed force and love, and he stood by one of the fanners and whispered, 'Brother, the next is me', and the fanner fanned on and the Mahatma spoke on, and Moorthy looked from the audience to the Mahatma and from the Mahatma to the audience, and he said to himself, 'There is in it something of the silent communion of the ancient books,' and he turned again to the fanner.. And Moorthy stood by the Mahatma and the fan went one this side and once that, and beneath the fan came a voice deep and stirring that went out to the hearts of those men and women and came streaming back through the thrumming air, and went through the fan and the hair and the nails of Moorthy into the very limbs, and Moorthy shivered and then there came flooding up in rings and ripples, 'Gandhi Mahatma ki jai!' – 'Jai Mahatma!', and as it broke against Moorthy, the fan went faster and faster over the head of the Mahatma, and perspiration flowed down the forehead of Moorthy. Then came a dulled silence of his blood, and he said to himself, 'Let me listen,' and he listened, and in listening, heard, 'There is but one force in life and that is Truth, and there is but one love in life and that is the love of mankind, and there is but one God in life and that is the God of all,' and then came a shiver and he turned to the one behind him and said 'Brother,' and the man took the fan from Moorthy and Moorthy trembled..and sought his way out to the open, but there were men all

about him and behind the men women, and behind them carts and bullocks and behind them the river, and Moorthy said to himself 'No, I cannot go'. And he sat beside the platform, his head in his hands, and tears came to his eyes, and he wept softly, and with weeping came peace. He stood up, and he saw there, by the legs of the chair, the sandal and the foot of the Mahatma, and he said to himself, 'That is my place.' And suddenly there was a clapping of hands and shoutings of 'Vande mataram, Gandhi Mahatma ki jai!' and as there was fever and confusion about the Mahatma, he jumped onto the platform, slipped between this person and that and fell at the feet of the Mahatma, saying, 'I am your slave'. The Mahatma lifted him up and before them all, he said, 'What can I do for you my son?' and Mahatma said, 'You wear foreign clothes my son' – 'It will go, Mahatmaji.' 'You perhaps go to foreign Universities' – 'It will go', Moorthy said, 'I am ignorant, how can I seek Truth?' - and the people around him were trying to hush him and to take him away... 'You can help your country by going and working among the dumb millions of the villages' – 'So be it Mahatmaji,' and the Mahatma patted him on the back, and through that touch was revealed to him as the day is revealed to the night the sheathless being of his soul; and Moorthy drew away, and as it were with shut eyes groped his way through the crowd to the bank of the river. And he wandered about the fields and the lanes and the canals and when he came back to the College that evening, he threw his foreign clothes and his foreign books into the bonfire, and walked out, a Gandhi's man..³⁴

Towards the end of the book, the narrative relates to North India, as the nationalist volunteers attempt to raise the morale of the villagers. They describe the events in Peshawar:

And suddenly, across the Bebbur Mound, we saw shapes crawl along and duck down and rise up, and we said, 'Perhaps soldiers - soldiers,' but 'In Peshawar,'

³⁴ Raja Rao. 2007. *Kanthapura*, Delhi Orient Paperbacks: 39-41. I am indebted to my friend Abhishekara, PhD student from Jawaharlal Nehru University for calling my attention to this novel.

says the city boy, 'you know they would not shoot,' and we said we too are soldiers, and we are the soldiers of the Mahatma, and this country is ours, and we said to ourselves, a day will come, a day when hut after hut will have a light at dusk, and flowers will be put on the idols, and camphors lit, and as the last Red-man leaps into his boat, and the earth pushes him away, through our thatches will a song rise like a thread of gold, and from the lotus-navel of India's earth the Mahatma will speak of love to all men. 'Say Mahatma Gandhi ki jai!' - 'Inquilab Zindabad, Inquilab Zindabad!' - and the Police lathis showered on us, and the procession-throne fell, and the gods fell, and the flowers fell, and the candalebras fell, and yet the gods were in the air, brother, and not a cry nor lamentation rose, and when we reached the village gate, suddenly from the top of the pipal someone swings down and he has a flag in hand, and he cries out,

*Lift the flag high,
O Lift the flag high,
Brothers, sisters, friends and mothers,
This is the flag of the Revolution,*

and the Police rush at him, and he slips in here and he slips out there and the boys have taken the flag, and the flag flutters and leaps from hand to hand, and with it the song is clapped out:

*O Lift the flag high,
Lift it high like in 1857 again..³⁵*

What is striking about *Kanthapura* is the depiction of the psychological transformation of the villagers - an overcoming of the fear of officialdom and the first halting confrontation with deep-rooted caste prejudice. All this takes place as part of the nationalist awakening, and is inspired by the Mahatma's message. Gandhi's charisma is palpable in its pages, in the elemental forms that it might have assumed for humble

³⁵ *Kanthapura*, 170-171.

Indians.

Gandhi during Partition

The year 1946 had seen the worst outburst of communal killing in the decade before partition. It took place in Calcutta as a result of Jinnah's call for Direct Action on August 16. (The Muslim League was then in power as a provincial government under Chief Minister Husain Suhrawardy). There were reports of between five to ten thousand people being killed and fifteen thousand injured between August 16 and 19. The presence of the Chief Minister and his associates, as well as his intemperate speeches made in the course of the run-up to Direct Action Day gave rise to suspicions about deliberate political instigation of the massacre. No single event served to embitter communal relations and the political atmosphere more than this event, which came to be known as the Great Calcutta Killing of 1946.³⁶ The months following the riots were perhaps the most tense the city had experienced in its recent history. From November 1946 till the end of February 1947, Gandhi spent his time walking in the district of Noakhali, in North Bengal, which had been badly affected by communal violence. This was a Muslim majority area, soon to become part of East Pakistan. This pilgrimage for peace became legendary as his prayer meetings and public discourses healed the public psyche, encouraged Hindus to return to their villages, and Muslims to discard their animus. The area still has a Gandhi Museum, and memories of the Mahatma's visit there still linger among the elderly.³⁷

For contemporary observers, therefore, it was nothing short of a miracle that Hindus and Muslims in their thousands attended Gandhi's prayer meetings and even celebrated Eid together on August 18, 1947. For once, British officialdom was much relieved at Gandhi's presence. On August 26, Viceroy Mountbatten sent him a telegram stating: 'My dear Gandhiji, In the Punjab we have 55 thousand soldiers and large-scale rioting on our

³⁶ See C. Markovits. 2007. *The Calcutta Riots of 1946*, see bibliography for the web-link. My late father, Lt. Col. E.J. Simeon, was an Indian Army officer stationed in Fort William, Calcutta in August 1946, and a witness to these events. He was convinced of the responsibility of the political leadership.

³⁷ See the interviews with residents of Noakhali, in R. Gandhi.2006. *Mohandas: A True Story of a Man, his People, and an Empire*, New Delhi: Penguin-Viking, 591-593.

hands. In Bengal our forces consist of one man, and there is no rioting... As a serving officer may I be allowed to pay my tribute to the One Man Boundary Force.' For its part, the Muslim League fraction in the Constituent Assembly in Delhi passed a resolution expressing its 'deep sense of appreciation of the services rendered by Mr Gandhi to the cause of restoration of peace and goodwill between the communities in Calcutta'.³⁸

Less than a month later, on August 31 1947, Calcutta witnessed a renewed outbreak of violence, which prompted Gandhi to cancel his much-awaited trip to the Punjab and remain in the city. On the evening of September 1, he announced his decision to fast against violence. He stayed in the abandoned Hydari Mansion in a Muslim part of the city. Within a day, students began to take out peace processions, and even the north Calcutta police force, including Europeans and Anglo-Indians, wore arm-bands and fasted on duty in sympathy with Gandhi. The following day bands of hooligans came to him to surrender their weapons and plead with him to cease endangering his life. Gandhi is reported to have commented that it was the first time he had set eyes on a sten-gun.³⁹ On September 4, 1947, he was paid a visit by a senior delegation of politicians, including members of the business community, the Muslim League-led Seaman's Union, the Hindu Mahasabha, and Chief Minister Suhrawardy. He made them swear they would give their own lives before allowing another outbreak of communal violence to take place. This unprecedented oath was then written down and signed by the entire delegation. The prominent Tamil Congressman Chakravarthi Rajagopalachari, who became independent India's second Governor General, remarked that not even the successful struggle for Independence was 'as truly wonderful as his victory over evil in Calcutta'.⁴⁰ In an editorial on September 1, the colonial-minded English editor of *The Statesman* made a point of announcing that henceforth 'Mr Gandhi' would be referred to in his columns as the Mahatma.

³⁸ D. Dalton. Gandhi During Partition: A Case Study in the Nature of Satyagraha; in C.H. Philips and M. D. Wainwright. 1970. *The Partition of India: Policies and Perspectives 1935-1947*, London: George Allen and Unwin, fn 5 and 6, 234.

³⁹ See R. Gandhi, *Mohandas*, 636-637; and Philips and Wainwright; *ibid*, 235-238.

⁴⁰ *The Statesman*, September 6, 1947

Confronted by the violence of 1946 Gandhi had said, 'It has become the fashion these days to ascribe all such ugly manifestations to the activities of hooligans. It hardly becomes us to take refuge in that moral alibi. Who are the hooligans after all? They are our own countrymen, and so long as any countryman of ours indulges in such acts, we cannot disown responsibility for them consistently with our claim that we are one people... Mankind is at the crossroads. It has to make its choice between the law of the jungle and the law of humanity.'⁴¹ And at the height of the violence of 1947 he said, 'it is time for peace-loving citizens to assert themselves and isolate goondaism. Non-violent non-cooperation is the universal remedy. Good is self-existent, evil is not. It is like a parasite living in and around good. It will die of itself when the support that good gives it is withdrawn.'⁴² If we were to use Gandhi's logic to describe the situation he confronted in 1947 we could say that the struggle between violence and *ahimsa* was going on in every soul, and was not merely demarcated by the social distance between goondas and polite society.

Gandhi's Charisma

Charisma is not reducible to an aspect of an individual personality, though personal strength and style are essential to it. Nor is it a quality bestowed upon the charismatic figure by an adoring public. It lies, rather in the resonance between leader and followers, and signifies an awareness of historical needs. These needs include psychic expectations that may take many forms, some of them conflicting with others. But howsoever substantial be the public mood, the emergence of a charismatic personality remains a fortuitous event, irreducible to objective determinations. It would be a travesty of historical method to say that had there not been Gandhi, someone like him would have appeared on account of historic necessity.

I find it noteworthy that the word 'resonance' carries an acoustic meaning. This means

⁴¹ Speech at prayer meeting in Bombay, March 11, 1946; *CWMG*, vol 90, 64.

⁴² Extract from a conversation in Calcutta on September 4, 1947, reported by N. K. Bose in *Harijan*, September 14, 1947; *CWMG*; vol 96, 335. *Goonda* is the Hindi word for hooligan.

that certain emotions and ideas are awakened in the followers, who in turn will the leader to nurture those feelings and ideas in furtherance of the cause. Charisma is a psychological power and expresses self-recognition on the part of everyone involved, a recognition of qualities of head and heart of which they were previously unaware, or only dimly aware. It was Gandhi's capacity to pierce the hearts of everyone, including those who were personally engaged in violence and killing, that lay at the heart of his charisma.

Gandhi's charismatic influence has not waned, despite the iconisation, cynicism and hostility directed at him by the Indian middle classes. The latter has ebbed recently with the appearance of films such as *Lage Raho Munnabhai* (2006) that popularised the idea of *Gandhigiri*,⁴³ although it was a de-politicised Gandhi that was presented here. Aside from the middle class, if there are still thousands of humble citizens who visit the site of his assassination every day, this is because he touched an unshakeable chord in the hearts and minds of ordinary Indians. We need also to take note of Gandhi's stature in the world outside India, which perhaps respects him more than do his compatriots. What is the reason for this lasting impact? I suggest the following:

1. His reputation as a tireless worker for communal harmony: Since the sub-continent has been plagued by communal strife, and since a communal Partition took place despite Gandhi's best efforts, a nostalgic memory of those efforts persists.
2. His stature as the man who prised Indias' freedom from the grip of the mighty British Raj.
3. The peoples' experience of Gandhi as a leader who remained physically close to his most humble compatriots, scorning police protection, who did not flinch from placing himself in dangerous places.
4. His insistence on the secular character of public space in independent India. His

⁴³ A neologism that can roughly be translated as "Gandhi-like behaviour."

charisma lent legitimacy and weight to the norms he wanted to see inscribed in the Indian Constitution.

5. A renewed interest in Gandhi's critique of modern technological civilisation

But there is something more. In a country so conscious of local and caste identity, Gandhi is perceived as one who left vernacular identity behind him. He was a *bania* by caste, and a Gujarati speaking and English-trained lawyer. However, he surpassed these identities and obtained the allegiance of so-called virile ethnic groups as well as poor 'outcaste' rural communities. *Banias*, traditionally the caste-cluster engaged in commerce are typecast as instrumentalist in outlook, disinclined to engage in confrontation. For a *bania* to command the unstinted respect of Pathans and Sikhs was remarkable. It is noteworthy that by his demeanour, Gandhi was almost unconsciously democratic. As Orwell said of him, 'he was not afflicted by envy or by the feeling of inferiority. Colour feeling, which he first met in South Africa, seems to have astonished him. Even when he was fighting what was in effect a colour war, he did not think of people in terms of race or status. The governor of a province, a cotton millionaire, a half-starved Dravidian coolie, a British private soldier were all equally human beings, to be approached in much the same way.'⁴⁴

Gandhi bore the identity of a renunciator, someone who cannot be summed up in terms of caste or linguistic identity, but whose character has risen above it all. He was no populist, and never bothered to adjust his ideas and convictions to shifting public moods and perceptions. In the midst of the most bitter public recriminations, especially during the dark and tragic days of Partition, Gandhi endured vicious barbs from people who had lost everything, including their loved ones to communal hatred and cruelty. In this upsurge of bitterness, he asked people to retain their faith in humanity, comforted the inconsolable, silently suffered the barbs, even abuse of humans damaged by grief. A young Punjabi judge, himself a refugee from Lahore who met Gandhi in October 1947 to discuss mundane matters pertaining to evacuee property, noticed his calm, practical and

⁴⁴ G. Orwell. 1949. *Reflections on Gandhi*, 1949. See bibliography for the link to this article.

matter-of-fact demeanour as they spoke, but then felt constrained to observe, 'Realisation came to me that this man had only one sentiment in his heart and that was the sentiment of love. When he looked at me I noticed a softness in his eyes and I felt ashamed.' ⁴⁵ The wife of the American journalist Upton Close expressed it as follows: 'In his presence I felt a new capability and power in myself rather than a consciousness of his power. I felt equal, good for anything - an assurance I had never known before, as if some consciousness within me had newly awakened.' ⁴⁶

At a prayer-meeting on November 29, 1947, Gandhi decried the conversion of mosques into temples, and demanded they be returned to their original status. He then observed, 'But when someone commits a crime anywhere I feel I am the culprit. You too should feel the same.. Let us all merge in each other like drops in an ocean.' ⁴⁷ This utterance hints at the ontological root of his non-violence.⁴⁸ It was his sense of being at one with all Indians - indeed, all humanity - that lay at the root of Gandhi's charisma. Indians could not get away from him for good or ill; he manifested what was best in them, even when they hated him. A people obsessed with virility was bemused by his combination of gentleness and courage. That is why his fasts worked best when they were directed at the conscience of his compatriots. He had no official protection at a time when he had already become a target for assassination. He died on his feet, standing up, God's name on his lips, having taken three bullets fired from close range into his chest and stomach. His unique blend of non-violence and moral force represented a remarkable detachment of manliness from ferocity and militarism. There is no doubt that the Indian people sensed how different he was from virtually all the leaders in the contemporary world.

Gandhi remains recalcitrant, a character indissoluble in the language and practices of

⁴⁵ From the memoir of G.D. Khosla, cited in R. Gandhi, *Mohandas*, 654.

⁴⁶ cited in R. Gandhi, *Mohandas: A True Story*, 633.

⁴⁷ M.K. Gandhi, *CWMG*; vol 97, 420

⁴⁸ 'Gandhi rejected violence on four grounds: the ontological, the epistemological, the moral and the practical. Being a manifestation of *Brahman*, every living being was divine. Taking life was therefore sacrilegious and a form of deicide.' B. Parekh. 1989. *Colonialism, Tradition and Reform: An Analysis of Gandhi's Political Discourse*, New Delhi: Sage Publications, 155.

political cynicism. There has been no routinisation of his personality, he had no inheritors, there is no organisation that can claim his mantle. He is known to have desired the dissolution of the Congress Party because its main goal - Independence - had been attained. There were and there remain, powerful ideological currents opposed to him, and some that even take pride in his assassination. The ideology of Pakistan needs to portray him as a Hindu leader, nothing more, and the radical left takes issue with his unabashed use of religious metaphors; even though he insisted on a secular state for Independent India. His insistence on non-violence continues to cause unease even amongst his admirers. His life and ideals raise profound questions, although he did not care to place them philosophically.⁴⁹ Contrary to the modernist political tradition exemplified by Machiavelli and Robespierre that held violence essential to the act of political foundation, Gandhi made the prescient observation that 'what is granted under fear can be retained only as long as the fear lasts', an insight that calls into question the decisionist metaphysics of revolutionary political theory from the Jacobins to the Bolsheviks.⁵⁰ If routinisation is something more than and other than iconisation (of which there has been a great deal) Gandhi's charisma retains something of its magical and passionate quality, impossible to grasp completely, replicate or reduce to a humdrum dimension, yet impossible to remain unmoved by.

I began this essay by posing a question about the place of nobility in what is called charisma. If indeed there is no conceptual account of nobility, which must remain accessible to us only as a perception; the fact remains that even his severest critics intuitively grasped that Gandhi's historic stature was rooted in a profound nobility of spirit. And so it remains. If we cannot deduce nobility from axioms and logical principles, we can only understand it by recourse to example, and one example that will

⁴⁹ 'To write a treatise on the science of ahimsa is beyond my powers. I am not built for academic writings. Action is my domain, and what I understand, according to my lights, to be my duty, and whatever comes my way, I do. All my action is actuated by the spirit of service. Let anyone who can systematise ahimsa into a science do so, if indeed it lends itself to such treatment... The world does not hunger for shastras. What it craves, and will always crave, is sincere action...No man has ever been able to describe God fully. The same is true of ahimsa.' Gandhi, *Harijan*, March 3, 1946; CWMG; vol 90; 1-2.

⁵⁰ M.K. Gandhi. (1909), 2003. *Hind Swaraj, or Indian Home Rule*, Ahmedabad: Navjivan Publishing House, 60.

surely command widespread acceptance is the personality of the man whom Indians came to refer to as *Mahatma* - the Great Soul - or simply Bapu, Father. Mohandas Gandhi was undoubtedly a strong man and a towering political leader. But he was simultaneously full of gentleness, love and compassion. That is why his life and fearless final sacrifice became a foundation-stone for the constitutional edifice of the Indian Union. That is why Indians can never forget him, and the recognition of his greatness by people the world over continues unabated. ⁵¹

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⁵¹ In a millennium poll in 2000, Mahatma Gandhi was voted the greatest man of the past thousand years by readers of the BBC News website - BBC report dated 14 Nov 2005.
http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/education/4435032.stm

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